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Trump: I'm not thinking of firing special counsel

But president joins in criticizing Mueller's inquiry

BY JONATHAN LEMIRE
Associated Press

WASHINGTON

President Donald Trump said Sunday that he is not considering firing special counsel Robert Mueller even as his administration was again forced to grapple with the growing Russia probe that has shadowed the White House for much of his initial year in office.

Trump returned to the White House from Camp David and was asked if he was considering triggering the process to dismiss Mueller, who is investigating whether the president's Republican campaign coordinated with Russian officials during last year's election.

The president answered: "No, I'm not."

But he did add to the growing conservative criticism of Mueller's move to gain access to thousands of emails sent and received by Trump officials before the start of his administration, yielding attacks from transition lawyers and renewing chatter that Trump may act to end the investigation.

"It's not looking good. It's quite sad to see that. My people were very upset about it," Trump said. "I can't imagine there's anything on them, frankly. Because, as we said, there's no collusion. There's no collusion whatsoever."

On Saturday, the general counsel for the transition group sent a letter to two congressional committees arguing Mueller's investigators had improperly obtained thousands of transition records.

The investigators did not directly request the records from Trump's still-existing transition group, Trump for America, and instead obtained them from the General Services Administration, a separate federal agency that stored the material, according to the group's general counsel.

A spokesman for Mueller said the records were obtained appropriately.

"When we have obtained emails in the course of our ongoing criminal investigation, we have secured either the account owner's consent or appropriate criminal process," Peter Carr

SEE RUSSIA PROBE, 10A

MORE INSIDE
Special counsel obtains thousands of Trump transition emails. 5A

CHRIS CARLSON AP

A firefighter takes a cellphone picture of the Thomas Fire on Saturday in Montecito. The Thomas Fire is now the third-largest in state history.

Flames threaten coastal towns; procession mourns firefighter

BY CHRISTOPHER WEBER
Associated Press

LOS ANGELES

Thousands of firefighters tried Sunday to shield coastal communities from one of the biggest wildfires in California history while a funeral procession rolled past burn-scarred hillsides in honor of one of their colleagues who was killed battling the flames.

Crews cleared brush and dug containment lines above hillside neighborhoods in Santa Barbara County, taking advantage of slightly calmer winds a day after gusts fanned a flare-up that prompted more evacuations.

"Everything's holding really well," fire information officer Lisa Cox said. "Thousands of homes have been saved."

While gusts had eased somewhat, even lower intensity winds were still dangerous, she warned. The fire northwest of Los Angeles was 40 percent contained.

Television news footage showed at least one structure burned on property in the wealthy enclave of Montecito, and authorities said damage assessments could take days.

Mourners stood on freeway overpasses to pay respects to firefighter Cory Iverson, 32, who died Thursday of burns and smoke inhalation. His funeral procession was scheduled to wind through five Southern California counties before ending up at a funeral home in San Diego, where he was based with a state fire engine strike team. He is survived by his pregnant wife and a 2-year-old daughter.

MIKE ELIASON Santa Barbara County Fire Department

A Bombardier 415 Super Scooper makes a water drop in Santa Barbara on Sunday. The fire evacuation zone is now 17 miles long.

> "EVERYTHING'S HOLDING REALLY WELL. THOUSANDS OF HOMES HAVE BEEN SAVED.
>
> *Lisa Cox, fire information officer, about firefighters' efforts in Santa Barbara County's hillside neighborhoods*

The blaze is also blamed for the Dec. 6 death of a 70-year-old woman who died in a car crash on an evacuation route.

The fire that started nearly two weeks ago has burned more than 1,000 structures, including at least 750 homes. Some 18,000 more homes are still threatened.

Some evacuation orders were lifted to the east in Ventura County, where the blaze erupted, and officials reported making progress protecting the inland agricultural city of Fillmore.

Jim Holden returned to his neighborhood in the city of

SEE WILDFIRES, 10A

Sacramento County kids among most often absent in California

BY DIANA LAMBERT AND PHILLIP REESE
dlambert@sacbee.com

Sacramento County students have the worst chronic absentee rate in the region and a higher rate than all but two of the other 20 largest counties in California – Sonoma and San Joaquin.

According to new state data, 14.8 percent of Sacramento County students missed one-tenth of their classes last school year. By comparison, 10.8 percent of students statewide missed that many classes.

The new numbers were released this month as the state Department of Education launched a new information "dashboard" designed to give families and educators a new way to track school performance.

Officials at Twin Rivers Unified and Sacramento City Unified said they weren't surprised by the numbers. Both districts have been monitoring chronic absenteeism and have tried to reduce absences. They had among the highest absentee rates in the county, along with San Juan Unified in the northeast county suburbs.

"We embrace and support

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